

The Loss of the "Agra"

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The Loss of the "Agra"

FROM

"Hard Cash"

BY

CHARLES READE

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW

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THE LOSS OF THE "AGRA"

CHAPTER I

The Voyage Begins

The time, March, 18—; the place, Whampoa, on the Canton River. Ships at anchor reared their tall masts here and there, and the broad stream was enlivened and coloured with junks and boats of all sizes and vivid hues.

At times a gorgeous mandarin boat, with two great glaring eyes set in the bows, came flying along, rowed with forty paddles by an armed crew, whose shields hung on the gunwale and flashed fire in the sunbeams; the mandarin, in conical and buttoned hat, sitting on the top of his cabin calmly smoking opium, while his gong boomed, and his boat flew fourteen miles an hour, and all things scuttled out of his lordly way.

And there, looking majestically down on all these

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water-ants, the huge *Agra*, the pride and hope of so many loving hearts in England, lay at her moorings, homeward bound.

Her tea not yet being on board, the ship's hull floated high as a castle, and to the calm, doll-faced, bolus-eyed, but brainy people that sculled to and fro, busy as bees, though looking forked mushrooms, she sounded like a vast musical shell. For, at the time, the lusty harmony of many mellow voices vibrated in her great cavities, and made the air ring cheerily around her.

The singers were giants, to judge by the tremendous thumps that kept clean time to their sturdy tune. Yet it was but human labour, so heavy and so knowing that it had called in music to help. It was the third mate and his gang completing his floor to receive the coming tea-chests.

Yesterday he had stowed many hundred bundles of light, flexible canes from Sumatra and Malacca; on these he had laid tons of rough saltpetre in two-hundred-pound bags, and was now mashing it, to music, bags and all.

His gang of fifteen, naked to the waist, stood in line, with huge wooden blocks called commanders, and lifted them high and brought them down on the nitre with heavy bumps as they sang. When the saltpetre was well mashed, they rolled ton water-butts on it till the floor was like a billiard-table.

A fleet of chop boats then began to arrive, so many per day, with the tea-chests. Mr. Grey proceeded to lay the first tier on his saltpetre floor, and then build up the chests tier upon tier, beginning at the sides, and leaving in the middle a lane somewhat narrower than a tea-chest.

Then he applied a screw-jack to the chests on both sides, and so enlarged his central passage and forced the remaining tea-chests in; and behold the enormous cargo packed as tight as ever shopkeeper packed a box: nineteen thousand eight hundred and six chests, sixty half-chests, fifty quarter-chests.

While Mr. Grey was contemplating his work with singular satisfaction, a small boat from Canton ran alongside, and Mr. Tickell, midshipman, ran up the side, skipped on the quarter-deck, saluted it first, and then the first mate, and gave him a note from the captain, desiring him to take the ship down to Second Bar—for her water—at the turn of the tide.

Two hours after receipt of this order the ship swung to the ebb. Instantly Mr. Sharpe unmoored, and the *Agra* began her famous voyage. She crossed the Bar at sunset, and anchored in five fathoms and a half.

Here they began to take in their water, and on the fifth day the six-oared gig was ordered up to Canton for the captain. The next afternoon he passed the ship in her, going down the river to Lin-Tin to board

the Chinese admiral for his chop, or permission to leave China.

All night the *Agra* showed three lights at her mast-head for him, and kept a sharp look-out. But he did not come. He was having a very serious talk with the Chinese admiral. At daybreak, however, the gig was reported in sight. Sharpe told one of the midshipmen to call the boatswain and man the side.

Soon the gig came alongside. Two of the ship's boys jumped like monkeys over the bulwarks, and put the side-ropes into the captain's hands. He bestowed a slight, kindly smile on them, the first the imps had ever received from an officer, and went lightly up the sides.

The moment his foot touched the deck the boatswain gave a frightful shrill whistle. The men at the sides uncovered, the captain saluted the quarter-deck, and all the officers saluted him. He returned the salute, and, stepping for a moment to the side of his deck, gave the loud command: "All hands heave anchor!"

He then directed Mr. Sharpe to get what sail he could on the ship, and dived into his cabin.

The boatswain piped three shrill pipes, and "All hands up anchor", and up tumbled the crew with "homeward bound" written on their tanned faces.

In ten minutes the ninety and odd hammocks were all stowed neatly in the netting, and covered with a

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snowy hammock-cloth; and soon, to the tramp, tramp, tramp of the sailors' feet as they marched round and round the capstan, the anchor was weighed. Round came the *Agra* slowly and majestically, her sails filled, and the good ship bore away for England. At three p.m. she was four miles from the land, and hove-to to take in her passengers.

A gun was fired from the forecastle. No boats came off. Sharpe began to fret; for the wind, though light, had now got to the north-west, and they were wasting it. After a while Captain Dodd came on deck and ordered all the carronades to be fired.

The eight heavy reports bellowed the great ship's impatience across the water, and out pulled two boats with the passengers. The first boat brought Colonel Kenealy, Mr. Fullalove, and a huge negro, who all mounted by the side-ropes.

But the whip was rigged for the next boat, and the Honourable Mrs. Beresford and poodle were hoisted on board, also her white maid, also her black nurse, also her little boy and male Oriental in charge thereof, the latter a singular compound of dignity and servility, and of black and white, being clad in snowy cotton and jappanned to the nine.

Mrs. Beresford was the wife of a member of Council in India. She had been away for her boy's health, intending to return to Calcutta; but meantime her husband was made a director, and went home; so

she was now going to join him. A tall, handsome lady with too curved a nose.

She was a woman born to domineer; and for the last ten years Asiatic and European alike had done their best to spoil her, the one by servility, the other by flattery. Like processes had been applied to her boy Frederick from infancy; he was now nearly six. Mr. Fullalove was an American parson—to the naked eye,—grave, sober, lean, lank-haired. But some men are hidden fires. Fullalove was one of the extraordinary products of an extraordinary nation, the United States of America.

He was an engineer for one thing and an inventor for another. He held two patents of his own creating which yielded him a good income both at home and in Great Britain.

At times, when the inventive fit was on him, he would disappear to some remote part of the country and live the life of an Indian, returning, bronzed and skin-clad, to enter with like zeal into the details of business life in cities. America is fertile in mixtures. Well, one day she outdid herself, and mixed Fullalove: preacher, hunter, inventor, traveller, and what not.

The passenger boat cast loose.

"All hands make sail." The boatswain piped, the light-heeled topsmen sped aloft and lay out on the yards, while all on deck looked up as usual to see them work. Out spread sail after sail aloft; the ship came

curtsying round to the southward, spread her snowy wings high and wide, and went like a bird over the wrinkled sea—homeward bound.

It was a grand start, and all faces were bright—but one. The captain looked somewhat grave and thoughtful, and often scanned the horizon with his glass. He gave polite but short answers to his friend, Colonel Kenealy, who was firing nothings into his ear, and sent for the gunner. While that personage, a crusty old Niler called Monk, is cleaning himself to go on the quarter-deck, let us peep into the troubled mind of Captain Dodd to find the cause of his uneasiness.

It had always been his pride to lay by money for his wife and two children, away in England, and, under the advice of an Indian friend, he had, during the last few years, placed considerable sums in a Calcutta firm, which paid him a high rate of interest. His hoard grew fast. When his former old ship, sore battered off the Cape, was condemned by its owners, he sailed to Calcutta, intending to return thence to England as a passenger. But, while he was at Calcutta, the greatest firm in that city suspended payment, carrying astonishment and dismay into a hundred families.

Dodd, who till then had trusted these great houses with a child-like confidence, was at once seized with a blind terror. He felt guilty towards his children for risking their money with any firm, and vowed that, if

ever he got hold of it once more, he would never trust it out of his own hands again, except, perhaps, to the Bank of England.

But should he ever get it? It was a large sum. He went to Messrs. Anderson and Anderson for his fourteen thousand pounds. To his dismay, but hardly to his surprise, the clerks looked at one another, and sent his cheque into some inner department.

Dodd was kept waiting. His heart sank within him; there was a hitch.

Meantime came a Government officer, and paid in an enormous sum in notes and bills, chiefly the latter.

Presently Dodd was invited into the manager's room.

"Leaving the country, Captain Dodd?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had better take some of your money in bills at sight on London."

"I would rather have notes, sir," faltered Dodd.

"Oh, bills are just as good! However, you can have half-and-half. Calcutta does but little in English bank-notes, you know."

They gave him his money. The bills were all manifestly good. But he recognized one of them as having just been paid in by the civilian. He found himself somehow safe in the street, clutching the cash, with one half of his great heart on fire and the other half freezing. He had rescued his children's fortune, but

he had seen destruction graze it. His next feeling was precaution; he went and bought a great broad pocket-book with a key to it; though he was on dry land, he covered it with oiled silk against the water, and sewed the whole thing to his flannel waistcoat, and felt for it with his hand a hundred times a day: the fruit of his own toil, his children's hoard, the rescued treasure he was to have the joy of bringing home safe to the dear partner of all his joys.

Unexpectedly he was ordered out to Canton to sail the *Agra* to the Cape. Then a novel and strange feeling came over him like a cloud; that feeling was a sense of personal danger. Not that the many perils of the deep were new to him; he had faced them this five-and-twenty years, but till now they were little present to his imagination. They used to come, be encountered, be gone; but now, though absent, they darkened the way. It was the pocket-book. The treasure, the hard cash, which had lately set him in a glow, seemed now to load his chest and hang heavy round the neck of his heart. Sailors are more or less superstitious, and men are creatures of habit, even in their courage. Now David had never gone to sea with a lot of money on him before. As he was a stout-hearted man, these vague forebodings would, perhaps, have cleared away with the bustle when the *Agra* set sail, but for a piece of intelligence he had picked up at Lin-Tin. The Chinese admiral had warned him of a pirate, a daring

pirate, who had been lately cruising in these waters; had taken a Russian ship at the very mouth of the Canton river, murdered the crew in sight of land, and sold the women for slaves.

Dodd asked for particulars: In what latitude was he to be looked for? The admiral on this examined his notes. By these it appeared that little was known as yet about the villain, except that he never cruised long on one ground. The crew was a mixed one; the captain was believed to be a Portuguese, and to have a consort commanded by his brother; but this was doubtful; at all events the pair had never been seen at work together.

The gunner arrived and saluted the quarter-deck; the captain on this saluted him, and beckoned him to the weather side. On this the other officers kept away to leeward.

"Mr. Monk," said Dodd, "you will clean and prepare all the small-arms directly."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old Niler with a gleam of satisfaction.

"How many of your deck guns are serviceable?" This simple question stirred up in one moment all the bile in the poor old gentleman's nature.

"My deck guns serviceable! How can they be when your third mate has been and lashed the weather butts to their breechings, and jammed his gear in

between their nozzles till they can't breathe, poor things, far less bark. I wish he was tied up with a red-hot cable as tight as he has jammed my guns."

Here was a fine state of affairs!

Now, when a man has a deep anxiety, some human midge or other buzzes at him. It is a rule. So now to Dodd, heavy with responsibility, came one delicately, and by degrees, to wit, the Hindoo, hopping like a magpie, and putting his hands together as a child at prayer, and delivered a message that his mistress, "the daughter of light", wished to see Dodd in her cabin.

Dodd hailed Mr. Tickell, a midshipman, and sent him down to the lady's cabin. Mr. Tickell soon came back, reddish but grinning, to say that nothing less than the captain would do.

Dodd sighed, and dismissed Monk with a promise to inspect the gun-deck himself; then went down to Mrs. Beresford and found her indignant. Why had he stopped the ship miles and miles from shore and given her the trouble and annoyance of a voyage in that nasty little boat? Dodd opened his great brown eyes: "Why, madam, it was shoal water; we dare not come in."

"That will not do, sir. What have I to do with your shoal water? It was laziness, and want of consideration for a lady who has rented half your ship."

"Nothing of the kind, madam, I assure you."

"Are you the person they call Gentleman Dodd?"

"Yes."

"Then don't contradict a lady, or I shall take the liberty to dispute your title."

Dodd took no notice of this, and, with a patience few commanders would have shown, endeavoured to make her see that he was obliged to give shoals a wide berth, or cast away the ship. She would not see it. When Dodd saw she wanted, not an explanation, but a grievance, he ceased to reason with her. "I am néglecting my duties to no purpose," said he, and left her. This was a fresh offence, and, as he went out, she declared open war. And she made it too from that hour—a war of pins and needles.

Dodd went on the gun-deck and found that the defence of the ship had, as usual in these peaceful days, been sacrificed to the cargo. Out of twenty eighteen-pounders she carried on that deck he cleared three, and that with difficulty. To clear any more he must have sacrificed either merchandise or water, and he was not the man to do either on the mere chance of a danger so unusual as an encounter with a pirate. He was a merchant captain, not a warrior.

Meantime the *Agra* had already shown him great sailing qualities, so that, with a good breeze abaft, few fore-and-aft rigged pirates could overhaul her. And this wind carried her swiftly past one nest of them, at all events—the Ladrone Isles. At nine p.m.

all the lights were ordered out. Mrs. Beresford had brought a novel on board, and refused to comply; the master-at-arms insisted. She threatened him with the vengeance of the Company, the premier, and the nobility and gentry of the British realm. The master-at-arms, finding he had no chance in argument, doused the glim—then basely fled the consequences.

CHAPTER II

A Pirate

The northerly breeze died out, and light variable winds baffled the ship. It was the 6th April ere she passed the Macclesfield Bank, in latitude 16° . And now they sailed for many days out of sight of land. Dodd's chest expanded. His main anxiety at this part of the voyage lay in the state-cabin; of all the perils of the sea none shakes a sailor like fire. He set a watch, day and night, on that spoiled child, Frederick.

On the 1st May they got among the Malay islands, at which the captain's glass began to sweep the horizon again, and, night and day, at the dizzy foretop-gallant mast-head he perched an eye.

They crossed the Line, in longitude 107° , with a slight breeze, but soon fell into the Doldrums. A dead calm, and nothing to do but kill time. Dodd had put down Neptune; that old rogue could no longer row out on the ship's port side and board her on the starboard—pretending to come from ocean's depths,—and shave the novices with a rusty hoop, and dab a

soapy brush in their mouths. But there was plenty of amusement; the sailors span yarns and danced rattling hornpipes, fiddled to by the grave Fullalove. "If there is a thing I can do, it's fiddle," said he. He and his friend, as he called Vespasian, the negro, taught the crew Yankee steps, and were beloved.

By this time the mates and midshipmen of the *Agra* had fathomed their captain. Mr. Tickell delivered the mind of the united midshipmen when he proposed Dodd's health in their mess-room "as a navigator, a seaman, a gentleman, and a brick, with three times three."

Dodd never spoke to his officers like a ruffian. He had a very pleasant way of conveying his approval of an officer's zeal, by a knowing nod with a kindly smile on the heels of it. As for the men, they seldom came in contact with the captain of a well-officered ship; this crew only knew him at first as a good-tempered soul, who didn't bother about trifles. But one day, as they lay becalmed south of the Line, a jolly foretopman came on the quarter-deck with a mug of soup, and, saluting and scraping first to the deck and then to the captain, asked him if he would taste that.

"Yes, my man. Smoked!"

"Like blazes, you honour, axing your pardon, and the deck's."

"Young gentleman," said Dodd to one of the midshipmen, "be so good as to send the cook aft."

The cook came, and received, not a threat, but a grim warning.

In the teeth of this he burnt the soup horribly the very next day. The crew sent the lucky foretopman aft again. He made his scrape and presented the soup. The captain tasted it, and sent Mr. Grey to bid the boatswain's mate pipe the hands on the deck and bring the cook aft.

"Quartermaster, unsling a fire-bucket and fill it with the soup. Mr. Tickell, see the cook swallow his own mess. Bo's'n's mate, take a rope, stand over him, and start him if he dallies with it."

With this the captain went below, and the cook, supping at the bucket, delivered himself as follows: "Well, ye lubbers, it is first-rate. There's no burn in it. It goes down like oil. Bother your ladylike tastes; you ain't fit for a ship. Why don't you go ashore and man a gingerbread coach, and feed off French frogs and Italian baccy-pipestems?"

Boatswain's mate—"Sup more and talk less."

"Well, I am supping as fast as I can, but I can't eat any more of it. (Whack, whack, whack.) Oh, good, kind Mr. Tickell, do go down to the captain for me!" (Whack, whack.)

"Avast!" cried the captain, reappearing.

"Silence, fore and aft!"

"The cook has received a slight punishment this time for spoiling the men's soup. My crew shall eat

nothing I can't eat myself. My care is heavier than theirs is, but not my work, nor my danger in time of danger. Mind that, or you'll find I can be as severe as any master afloat."

"Shipmates, listen to me," said the foretopman "This old *Agra* is a real com-for-table ship," and the sentence was hailed with a ringing cheer.

After lying a week, like a dead log, on the calm but heaving waters, came a few light puffs in the upper air, and at last it began to rain, and after the rain came a gale from the eastward. The watchful skipper saw it purple the water to windward, and ordered the topsails to be reefed and the lee ports closed. This last order seemed an excess of precaution; but Dodd was not yet thoroughly acquainted with his ship's qualities, and the hard cash round his neck made him cautious. The lee ports were closed, all but one, and that was lowered. Mr. Grey was working a problem in his cabin, and wanted a little light and a little air, so he just dropped his port and fastened a tackle to it, that he might have force to close it with should the ship lie over.

Down came the gale with a whoo, and made all crack. The ship lay over pretty much, and the sea poured in at Mr. Grey's port. He tried to close it. But, though his tackle gave him the force of a dozen hands, he might as well have tried to move a mountain; on the contrary, the tremendous sea rushed in and

burst the port wide open. Grey, after a vain struggle with its might, shrieked for help. Down tumbled the nearest hands, and hauled on the tackle in vain. Destruction was rushing on the ship, and on them first. But meantime the captain, with a shrewd guess at the general nature of the danger he could not see, had roared out: "Slack the main sheet." The ship righted, and the port came flying to, and terror-stricken men breathed hard up to their waists in water and floating boxes. Grey barred the unlucky port, and went aft, drenched in body and wretched in mind, to report his own fault. He found the captain looking grim as death. He told him, almost crying, what he had done and how he had miscalculated the power of the water.

Dodd looked and saw his distress. "Let it be a lesson, sir," said he sternly. "How many ships have been lost in that way, and not a man saved to tell the tale?"

"Captain, bid me fling myself over the side and I'll do it."

"Humph! I'm afraid I can't afford to lose a good officer for a fault—he—will—never—repeat."

It blew hard all the night and till twelve next day. The *Agra* showed her weak point—she rolled abominably. A dirty night came on. At eight bells Mr. Grey reported a light in Mrs. Beresford's cabin. It had been put out as usual by the master-at-arms, but she had relighted it.

"Go and take it away," said Dodd.

Soon screams were heard from the cabin. "Oh, mercy! mercy! I will not be drowned in the dark."

Dodd went down and tried to assure her. "Oh, the tempest! the tempest!" she cried. "And to be drowned in the dark!"

"Tempest? It is blowing half a gale of wind; that's all."

"Half a gale! Ah! that is the way you always talk to us ladies. Oh, pray give me my light, and send me a clergyman!"

Dodd took pity and let her have her light, with a midshipman to watch it. He even made a sort of promise that should there be one grain of danger he would lie to. The *Agra* broke plenty of glass and crockery though, with her fair wind and lee lurches.

Wind went down at noon next day, and a dead calm. The sun came out high in the heavens, and a balmy breeze set in from the west. Night stole on soft and clear, showing a glorious sky, and melted sweetly away. Morning broke in rosy hues over the sea, and up came the sun, huge and fiery, above the horizon.

Instantly the look-out at the foretop-gallant mast-head hailed the deck below:

"Strange sail! Right ahead!"

The strange sail was reported to Captain Dodd, then dressing in his cabin. He came soon after on

deck and hailed the look-out: "Which way is she standing?"

"Can't say, sir. Can't see her move any."

Dodd ordered the boatswain to pipe to breakfast, and, taking his deck-glass, went lightly up to the fore-top-gallant cross-trees. There, through the light haze of a glorious morning, he espied a long, low schooner, lateen-rigged, lying close under a small island about nine miles distant on the weather-bow, and nearly in the *Agra's* course. . . .

"She is hove-to," said Dodd very gravely.

At eight o'clock the stranger lay about two miles to windward, and still hove-to.

By this time all eyes were turned upon her, and half a dozen glasses. Everybody except the captain delivered an opinion. She was a Greek lying-to for water; she was a Malay coming north with canes, and short of hands; she was a pirate watching the Straits.

The captain leaned, silent and sombre, with his arms on the bulwarks, and watched the suspected craft.

"I think he is a Malay pirate," said Mr. Grey.

Sharpe took him up very quickly, and, indeed, angrily. "Nonsense! And if he is, he won't venture on a craft of this size."

"Says the whale to the sword-fish," suggested Fullalove with a little guttural laugh.

The captain, with his glass at his eye, turned half-round to the man at the wheel: "Starboard!"

"Starboard it is."

"Steer south-south-east!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" And the ship's course was thus altered two points.

The alteration produced no movement on the part of the mysterious schooner. She still lay-to under the land, with only a few hands on deck, while the *Agra* edged away from her and entered the Straits, leaving the schooner about two miles and a half distant to the north-west.

Ah! The stranger's deck swarms black with men, his sham ports fall as if by magic, his guns grin through the gaps like black teeth, his huge foresail rises and falls, and out he comes in chase.

CHAPTER III

A Grim Fight

The way the pirate dropped the mask, showed his black teeth, and bore up in chase was terrible. So dilates and bounds the sudden tiger on his unwary prey. There were stout hearts among the officers of the peaceable *Agra*, but danger in a new form shakes even the brave, and this was their first pirate. Their dismay broke out in ejaculations not loud, but deep.

"Hush!" said Dodd doggedly; "the lady!"

Mrs. Beresford had just come on deck to enjoy the balmy morning.

"Sharpe," said Dodd in a tone that conveyed no suspicion to the newcomer, "set the royals and flying-jib.—Port!"

"Port it is!" cried the man at the helm.

"Steer due south!" And, with these words in his mouth, Dodd dived to the gun-deck. . . .

The other officers stood gloomy and helpless, with their eyes glued, by a sort of sombre fascination, on their coming fate, and they literally jumped when

Mrs. Beresford, her heart opened by the lovely day, broke in on their nerves with her light treble.

"What a sweet morning, gentlemen! After all, a voyage is a delightful thing! Oh, what a splendid sea! And the very breeze is warm! Ah, and there's a little ship sailing along! Here, Freddy, Freddy darling, leave off beating the sailor's legs and come here and see this pretty ship. What a pity it is so far off! Ah! ah! what is that dreadful noise?"

For her horrible small-talk, that grated on those anxious souls like the mockery of some infantine fiend, was cut short by ponderous blows and tremendous smashing below. It was the captain staving in water-casks. The water poured out at the scuppers.

"Clearing the lee guns," said a middy, off his guard. . . .

Mrs Beresford had not heard, or not appreciated the remark; she prattled on till she made the mates and midshipmen shudder.

The day had ripened its beauty; beneath a purple heaven shone, sparkled, and laughed a blue sea. Beneath that fair, sinless, peaceful sky, wafted by a balmy breeze over those smiling, transparent waves, a bloodthirsty pirate bore down on them with a crew of human tigers; and a lady babble-babble-babble, babble-babble-babble, babbled in their quivering ears.

But now the captain came bustling on deck, eyed the loftier sails, saw they were drawing well, and

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appointed four midshipmen as staff to convey his orders. He gave Bayliss charge of the carronades, Grey of the cutlasses, and directed Mr. Tickell to break the bad news gently to Mrs. Beresford, and to take her below to the orlop deck. Then he ordered the purser to serve out beef, biscuit, and grog to all hands, saying: "Men can't work on empty stomachs, and fighting is hard work;" then beckoned the officers to come round him.

"Gentlemen," said he, "in crowding sail on this ship I had no hope of escaping that fellow on this tack; but I was, and am, most anxious to gain the open sea, where I can square my yards and run for it if I see a chance. At present I shall carry on till he comes up within range, and then, to keep the Company's canvas from being shot to rags, I shall shorten sail. To save ship and cargo, and all our lives, I shall fight while a plank of her swims. Better be killed in hot blood than walk the plank in cold."

The officers cheered faintly, the captain's dogged resolution stirred up theirs.

The pirate had gained another quarter of a mile and more. The ship's crew were hard at their beef and grog, and agreed among themselves that it was a comfortable ship. They guessed what was coming, and woe to the ship in that hour if the captain had not won their respect! . . .

Sail was shortened and the crew ranged. The captain came briskly on deck, saluted, jumped on a carronade, and stood erect.

“ Pipe silence fore and aft.

“ My men, the schooner coming up on our weather quarter is a pirate. His character is known; he scuttles every ship he boards, and murders the crew. We cracked on to get out of the narrows, and now we have shortened sail to fight this blackguard, and teach him not to molest a British ship.

“ I promise, in the Company’s name, twenty pounds prize-money to every man before the mast if we beat him off or out-manceuvre him, thirty if we sink him, and forty if we tow him astern into a friendly port. Eight guns are clear below—three on the weather side, five on the lee; for, if he knows his business, he will come up on the lee quarter. If he doesn’t, that is no fault of yours or mine. The muskets are all loaded, the cutlasses ground like razors——”

“ Hurrah!”

“ We have got women to defend——”

“ Hurrah!”

“ A good ship under our feet, the God of justice overhead, British hearts in our bosoms, and British colours flying—run ’em up—over our heads.” (The ship’s colours flew up to the fore, and the Union Jack to the mizzen peak.) “ Now, lads, I mean to fight this ship while a plank of her ” (stamping on the

deck) "swims beneath my foot, and—what do you say?"

The reply was a fierce "hurrah!" from a hundred throats, so loud, so deep, so full of volume it made the ship vibrate, and rang in the creeping-on pirate's ears. Fierce but cunning, he saw mischief in those shortened sails and that Union Jack, the terror of his tribe, rising to a British cheer. He lowered his main-sail and crawled upon the weather quarter.

Arrived within a cable's-length, he double-reefed his foresail to reduce his rate of sailing to nearly that of the ship.

The next moment a tongue of flame and then a gush of smoke issued from his lee-bow, and the ball flew screaming like a sea-gull over the *Agra's* mizzen-top.

He then put his helm up and fired his other bow-chaser, and sent his shot hissing and skipping on the water past the ship. This prologue made the novices wince. Bayliss wanted to reply with a carronade; but Dodd forbade him sternly, saying: "If we keep him aloof we are done for."

The pirate drew nearer, and, firing two guns in succession, hulled the *Agra* amidships and sent an eighteen-pound ball through her foresail. Most of the faces were pale on the quarter-deck. It was very trying to be shot at, and hit, and make no return. The next double discharge sent one shot smash through

the stern cabin window, and splintered the bulwark with another, wounding a seaman slightly.

"Lie down forward!" shouted Dodd through his trumpet. "Bayliss, give him a shot."

The carronade was fired with a tremendous report but no visible effect. The pirate crept nearer, steering in and out like a snake to avoid the carronades, and firing two heavy guns alternately into the devoted ship. He hulled the *Agra* now nearly every shot.

The two available carronades replied noisily, and jumped as usual. They sent one thirty-two pound shot clean through the schooner's deck and side; but that was literally all they did worth speaking of. . . .

At the next discharge the pirate chipped the mizzen-mast and killed a sailor on the fore-castle. Dodd put his helm down ere the smoke cleared, and got three carronades to bear, heavily laden with grape. Several pirates fell, dead or wounded, on the crowded deck, and some holes appeared in the fore-sail. This one interchange was quite in favour of the ship.

But the lesson made the enemy more cautious. He crept nearer, but steered so adroitly, now right astern, now on the quarter, that the ship could seldom bring more than one carronade to bear, while he raked her fore and aft with grape and ball.

In this alarming situation Dodd kept as many of the men below as possible; but, do all he could, four were killed and seven wounded.

Fullalove's word came too true—it was the sword-fish and the whale. It was a fight of hammer and anvil; one pounded, the other made a noise. Cautious and cruel, the pirate hung on the poor hulking creature's quarters and raked her at point-blank distance. He made her pass a bitter time. And her captain! It was hard to see the splintering hull, the parting shrouds, the shivered gear, and hear the shrieks and groans of his wounded, and he unable to reply in kind!

The sweat of agony poured down his face. Oh, if he could but reach the open sea, and square his yards, and make a long chase of it, perhaps fall in with aid! Wincing under each heavy blow, he crept doggedly, patiently on towards that one visible hope.

At last, when the ship was cleft with shot and peppered with grape, the channel opened; in five minutes more he could put her dead before the wind.

No! The pirate, on whose side luck had been from the first, got half a broadside to bear at long musket-shot, killed a midshipman by Dodd's side, cut away two of the *Agra's* mizzen-shrouds, wounded the gaff, and cut the jib-stay. Down fell that powerful sail into the water and dragged across the ship's forefoot, stopping her way to the open sea she panted for. The mates groaned; the crew cheered stoutly, as British tars do in any great disaster. The pirates yelled with ferocious triumph.

But most human events, even calamities, have two sides. The *Agra* being brought almost to a standstill, the pirate forged ahead against his will, and the combat took a new and terrible form. A rifle cracked in the *Agra's* mizzen-top, and the man at the pirate's helm jumped into the air and fell dead. Then the three carronades peppered him hotly, and he hurled an iron shower back with fatal effect.

Then at last the long eighteen-pounders on the gun-deck got a word in. Monk, the gunner, was not the man to miss a vessel alongside in a quiet sea. He sent two round-shot clean through him; the third splintered his bulwark and swept across his deck.

"His masts! fire at his masts!" roared Dodd to Monk through his trumpet. He then got the jib clear, and made what sail he could without taking all the hands from the guns.

This kept the vessels nearly alongside a few minutes, and the fight was hot as fire. The pirate now for the first time hoisted his flag. It was black as ink. His crew yelled as it rose. The Britons, instead of quailing, cheered with fierce derision. The pirate's wild crew of yellow Malays, black, chinless Papuans, and bronzed Portuguese served their side-guns—twelve-pounders—well, and with ferocious cries.

The white Britons, naked to the waist, grimed with powder, and spotted like leopards with blood, their own and their mates', replied with loud, undaunted

cheers, and deadly hail of grape from the quarter-deck. The master-gunner and his mates loading with a rapidity which the mixed races opposed could not rival, hulled the schooner well between wind and water, and then fired chain-shot at her masts, as ordered, and began to play the mischief with her shrouds and rigging.

The pirate, bold as he was, got sick of fair fighting first. He hoisted his mainsail, and drew rapidly ahead, with a slight bearing to windward, and dismounted a carronade and stove in the ship's quarter-boat by a parting shot.

The men hurled a contemptuous cheer after him. They thought they had beaten him off. But Dodd knew better. He was but retiring a little way to make a more deadly attack than ever. He would soon wear and cross the *Agra's* defenceless bows, to take her fore and aft at pistol-shot distance, or grapple and board the enfeebled ship, two hundred strong.

Dodd flew to the helm, and with his own hands put it hard a-weather, to give the deck-guns one more chance, the last, of sinking or disabling the destroyer. As the ship obeyed, and a deck-gun bellowed below him, he saw a vessel running out from the island, and coming swiftly up to his lee-quarter.

It was a schooner. Was she coming to his aid?

Horror! A black flag floated from her foremast head!

While Dodd's eyes were staring almost out of his head at this death-blow to hope, Monk fired again. Just then a pale face came close to Dodd's, and a solemn voice whispered in his ear: "Our ammunition is nearly done!"

Dodd seized Sharpe's hand, pointed to the pirate's consort coming up to finish them, and said with the calm of a brave man's despair: "Cutlasses! and die hard!"

At that moment the master-gunner fired his last gun. It sent a chain-shot on board the retiring pirate, took off a Portuguese head and spun it into the sea far to windward, and cut the schooner's foremast so nearly through that it trembled and nodded. Presently it snapped with a loud crack, and came down like a broken tree, with yard and sail, black flag and all. There, in one moment, lay the destroyer buffeting and wriggling—like a heron on the water with his long wing broken,—an utter cripple.

The victorious crew raised a stunning cheer.

"Silence!" roared Dodd with his trumpet. "All hands make sail!"

He set his courses, bent a new jib, and stood out to windward close-hauled, in hopes to make a good offing. Then he put his ship dead before the wind, which was now rising to a stiff breeze. In doing this he crossed the crippled pirate's stern within eighty yards; and sore was the temptation to rake him. But,

his ammunition being short, and his danger being imminent from the other pirate, he had the self-command to resist the great temptation. . . .

The situation of the merchant vessel, though not so utterly desperate as before Monk fired his lucky shot, was pitiable enough. If she ran before the wind the fresh pirate would cut her off. If she lay to windward she might postpone the inevitable and fatal collision, but this would give the crippled pirate time to refit and unite to destroy her. Add to this the failing ammunition and the thinned crew!

Dodd cast his eyes all round the horizon for help.

The sea was blank.

The bright sun was hidden now; drops of rain fell, and the wind was beginning to sing, and the sea to rise a little. . . .

"Sharpe," said he at last, "there must be a way out with such a breeze as this is now—if we could but see it!"

"Ay, if," groaned Sharpe.

Dodd mused again.

"About ship!" said he softly, like an absent man.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Steer due north!" said he, still like one whose mind was elsewhere.

When the ship was coming about he gave minute orders to the mates and the gunner, to ensure co-operation in the first part of a delicate and dangerous manœuvre he had resolved to try.

The wind was west-north-west; he was standing north. One pirate lay on his lee beam, stopping a leak between wind and water, and hacking the deck clear of his broken masts and yards. The other, fresh and thirsting for the easy prey, came up from the north-east, to weather on him and hang on his quarter, pirate-fashion.

When they were distant about a cable's length, the fresh pirate, to meet the ship's change of tactics, changed his own—put his helm up a little, and gave the ship a broadside, well aimed, but not destructive, the guns being loaded with ball.

Dodd, instead of replying immediately, as was expected, put his helm hard up and ran under the pirate's stern, and with his five eighteen-pounders raked him fore and aft; then, paying off, gave him three carronades crammed with grape and canister. The rapid discharge of eight guns made the ship tremble, and enveloped her in thick smoke.

Loud shrieks and groans were heard from the schooner. The smoke cleared; the pirate's main-sail hung on deck, his jibboom was cut off like a carrot and the sail struggling, his foresail hung in ribbons.

The ship rushed down the wind, leaving the schooner staggered, and all aboard. But not for long; the pirate fired his broadside after all at the now flying *Agra*, split one of the carronades in two, and killed a Lascar, and made a hole in the fore-sail. This done, he hoisted

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his main-sail again in a trice, sent his wounded below, flung his dead overboard, and came after the flying ship, yawing and firing his bow-chasers.

The ship was silent. She had no shot to throw away. Not only did she take these blows like a coward, but all signs of life disappeared on her except two men at the wheel and the captain on the main gangway.

Dodd had ordered the crew out of the rigging, armed them with cutlasses, and laid them flat on the forecastle.

The great, patient ship ran environed by her foes, one destroyer right in her course, another in her wake, following her with yells of vengeance, and pounding away at her—but no reply.

Suddenly the yells of the pirates on both sides ceased, and there was a moment of dead silence on the sea.

Yet nothing fresh happened.

Yes, this had happened: the pirates to windward and the pirates to leeward of the *Agra* had found out at one and the same moment that the merchant captain they had lashed and bullied and tortured was a patient but tremendous man. It was not only to rake the fresh schooner that he had put his ship before the wind, but also, by a double daring master-stroke, to hurl his monster ship bodily on the other.

Without a fore-sail the latter could never get out of his way.

Her crew had stopped the leak, had cut away and unshipped the broken fore-mast, and were stepping a new one when they saw the huge ship bearing down in full sail. Nothing easier than to slip out of her way, could they get the fore-sail to draw; but the time was short, the deadly intention manifest, the coming destruction swift.

After that solemn silence came a storm of cries as their seamen went to work to fit the yard and raise the sail, while their fighting-men seized their matchlocks and trained their guns. They were well commanded by a heroic able villain. Astern, the consort thundered; but the *Agra's* response was a dead silence more awful than broadsides.

For then was seen with what majesty the enduring Anglo-Saxon fights.

One of that indomitable race on the gangway, one at the fore-mast, two at the wheel, steered the great ship down on a hundred matchlocks and a grinning broadside, just as they would have steered her into a British harbour.

"Starboard!" said Dodd, in a deep calm voice, with a motion of his hand.

"Starboard it is."

The pirate wriggled ahead a little. The man forward made a silent signal to Dodd.

"Port!" said Dodd quietly.

"Port it is."

But at this critical moment the pirate astern sent a mischievous shot, and knocked one of the men to atoms at the helm.

Dodd waved his hand without a word. Another man rose from the deck and took his place in silence, laying his unshaking hand on the wheel stained with the warm blood of him whose post he took.

The high ship was now scarce sixty yards distant; she seemed to know; she reared her lofty figure-head with great awful shoots into the air.

But now the panting pirates got their new fore-sail hoisted with a joyful shout. It drew, the schooner gathered way, and their furious consort, close on the *Agra's* heels, just then scourged her deck with grape.

"Port!" said Dodd calmly.

"Port it is."

The giant prow darted at the escaping pirate. That acre of coming canvas took the wind out of the swift schooner's fore-sail; it flapped; oh, then she was doomed! That awful moment parted the races on board her. The Papuans and Zulus, their black faces livid and blue with horror, leaped, yelling, into the sea, or crouched and whimpered.

The yellow Malays and brown Portuguese, though blanched to one colour now, turned on death like dying panthers, fired two cannon slap into the ship's bows, and snapped their muskets and matchlocks at their solitary executioner on the ship's gangway.

Crash! The *Agra's* cut-water, in thick smoke, beat in the schooner's broadside.

Down went her masts to leeward, like fishing-rods whipping the water. There was a horrible, shrieking yell; wild forms leaped off on the *Agra*, and were hacked to pieces almost ere they reached the deck. There was a surge, a chasm in the sea, filled with an instant rush of ingulfing waves, a long, awful, grating, grinding noise, never to be forgotten in this world, all along under the ship's keel—and the fearful majestic monster passed on over the blank she had made, with a pale crew standing silent and awe-struck on her deck.

A cluster of wild heads and staring eyeballs were bobbing like corks in her foaming wake, sole relic of the blotted-out destroyer; and a wounded man was staggering on the gangway with hands uplifted and staring eyes.

Shot in two places—the head and the breast.

With a loud cry of pity and dismay Sharpe, Fullalove, and others rushed to catch him. Ere they got near, the captain of the triumphant ship fell down on his hands and knees, his head sunk over the gangway, and his blood ran fast and pattered in the midst of them, on the deck he had defended so bravely.

CHAPTER IV

The Tempest

They got to their wounded leader, and raised him. He revived a little; and, the moment he caught sight of Mr. Sharpe, he clutched him and cried: "Stunsels!"

"Oh, Captain," said Sharpe, "let the ship go! it is you we are anxious for now."

At this Dodd lifted up his hands and beat the air impatiently, and cried again in the thin querulous voice of a wounded man, but eagerly: "Stunsels! Stunsels!"

On this Sharpe gave the command: "Set to'-gallant stunsels! All hands set stunsels, 'low and aloft!"

While the unwounded hands swarmed into the rigging, the surgeon came aft in all haste; but Dodd declined him till all his men should have been looked to. Meantime he had himself laid on a mattress, his bleeding head bound tight with a wet cambric handkerchief, and his pale face turned toward the hostile schooner astern. She had hove-to, and was picking up the survivors of her blotted-out consort.

The group on the *Agra's* quarter-deck watched her to see what she would do next. Flushed with immediate success, the younger officers crowded their fears she would not be game to attack them again.

Dodd's fears ran the other way. He said, in the weak voice to which he was now reduced: "They are taking a wet blanket aboard; that crew of blackguards we swamped won't want any more of us. It all depends on the pirate captain; if he is not drowned, then blow wind, rise sea, or there's trouble ahead for us."

As soon as the schooner had picked up the last swimmer, she hoisted foresail, main-sail, and jib with admirable rapidity, and bore down in chase.

The *Agra* had meantime got a start of more than a mile, and was now running before a stiff breeze, with studding sails alow and aloft.

In an hour the vessels ran nearly twelve miles, and the pirate had gained half a mile.

At the end of the next hour they were out of sight of land, wind and sea rising, and the pirate only a quarter of a mile astern.

The schooner was now rising and falling on the waves, the ship only nodding, and firm as a rock.

"Blow wind, rise sea!" faltered Dodd.

Another half-hour passed without perceptibly altering the positions of the vessels. Then suddenly the wounded captain laid aside his glass, after a long

examination, and rose unaided to his feet in great excitement, and found his manly voice for a moment. He shook his fist at the now pitching schooner, and roared: "Good-bye, ye Portuguese lubber! out-fought, out-manœuvred, and out-sailed!"

He paid for the exertion, however, by sinking faint and helpless into his friend's arms, and the surgeon insisted on his being taken to his cabin and kept quiet.

As they were carrying him below, the pirate captain made the same discovery, that the ship was gaining on him. He hauled to the wind directly and abandoned the chase.

The next day a deep gloom reigned in the ship—grief for the dead, and fear that death had a heavier blow in store. The surgeon's report of Captain Dodd was most alarming; he had been delirious about midnight, and so continued.

Sharpe commanded the ship, and the rough sailors stepped like cats over that part of the deck beneath which their unconscious captain lay. If two men met on the quarter-deck, a look of anxious, but not hopeful, inquiry was sure to pass between them.

Among the constant inquirers was Ramgolam. The grave Hindoo often waylaid the surgeon at the captain's door to get the first intelligence. This marked sympathy with a hero in extremity was hardly expected

from a sage who at the first note of war's trumpet had hidden himself in a meal-bag.

One person, indeed, viewed him with great suspicion in consequence—Vespasian, a rival in matters of tint. The negro kept a sharp eye on the Hindoo, for whom he had a profound contempt.

But now matters were approaching a crisis with Dodd. The surgeon sat up with him nearly all night, and during the day his two friends, Fullalove and Kenealy, sat for hours in his cabin, watching sadly and waiting for the end.

One evening the surgeon took his place by Dodd's bedside, and the pair, whom one thing after another had drawn so close together, retired to Kenealy's cabin. They smoked together in silence, and at midnight shook hands with a sigh and parted.

They turned in; but, ere either of them was asleep, the captain's cabin seemed to fill with roars and shrieks of wild beasts, that made the whole ship ring in the silent night.

Kenealy and Fullalove burst in, the former with a drawn sword, the latter with a revolver, and there saw a sight that took their breath away.

The surgeon was not there; and two black men, one with a knife, and one with his bare claws, were fighting and struggling and trampling all over the cabin at once, and the dying man sitting up in his cot, pale, and glaring at them.

The two supple forms went whirling so fast, there was no grasping them to part them. But presently the negro seized the Hindoo by the throat. The Hindoo just pricked him in the arm with his knife, and the next moment his own head was driven against the side of the cabin with a stunning crack, and there he was, pinned, and wriggling, and bluish with fright, whereas the other dark face close against his was dark-grey with rage, and its two fireballs of eyes rolled fearfully, as none but African eyes can roll.

The cabin was soon filled, and Sharpe was for putting both the blacks in irons.

"Ye black scoundrels," he roared, "what business have you in the captain's cabin?"

Thus threatened, Vespasian panted out his tale. He had discovered this nigger, as he persisted in calling the Hindoo, prowling about the good captain's door, and asking stupid questions. He had watched him and seen him crawl in when the surgeon left. Then he told how he had followed the Hindoo stealthily, and found him, with a knife uplifted over the captain, robbing him.

At this a loud murmur filled the room, a very ugly one, the sort of snarl with which dogs fly at dogs' throats with their teeth, and men fly at men's throats with a cord.

"Be quiet!" commanded Sharpe. "Now then, you sir, how do you know he was robbing the captain?"

"How do I know? Yah! Captain, will you please tell this gentleman whether you don't miss a little book from your bosom?"

During this extraordinary scene Dodd had been looking from one speaker to another in great surprise and some confusion; but, at the negro's direct appeal, his hand went to his breast and clutched it with a feeble but heartrending cry.

"Oh, him not gone far! Yah! Yah!" And Vespasian stooped and took up an oilskin packet off the floor and laid it on the bed.

Dodd hurried the packet into his bosom, then turned, all gratitude, to his sable friend: "Now, God bless you! God bless you! Give me your honest hand! You don't know what you have done for me and mine!"

And, sick as he was, he wrung Vespasian's hand, and would not part with it. Vespasian patted him soothingly all over, and whimpered out: "Nebber you mind, Cap'n! You bery good man. Dis child bery fond of you a long time ago. You bery good man, outrageous good man! I propose your health!"

While Dodd was speaking the others were silent, out of respect; but now Sharpe broke in, and, with a desire to hear both sides, called on Ramgolam for his version.

This was to the effect that he thought the captain's bravery and other good qualities arose from his pos-

sessing the pocket-book, and, since Dodd was dying, he (Ramgolam) wished to possess it, so that he too might hold it as a charm against evil, and to bring him good luck.

The story was too thin, and Sharpe ordered him to be put into irons.

The surgeon then insisted on the cabin being cleared. But Dodd would not part with the three friends yet; he begged them to watch him, and see nobody else came in to take his children's fortune.

"I'll sink or swim with it; but oh! I doubt we shall have no luck while it is aboard me. I never had a pirate alongside before in all these years. What is this?—here's something in it now—something hard, something heavy; and—why, it's a bullet!"

On this announcement an eager inspection took place; and, sure enough, a bullet had passed through Dodd's coat and waistcoat, &c., and through the oil-skin and the leather pocket-book, and just dented the "Hard Cash", no more.

There was a shower of comments and congratulations.

The effect of this discovery on the sick man's spirits was remarkable. "I was a villain to belie it," said he. "It is my wife's and my children's, and it has saved my life for them."

He kissed it and placed it in his bosom, and soon after sunk into a peaceful slumber. The excitement

had not the ill effect the surgeon feared; it somewhat exhausted him, and he slept long, but, on awakening, was pronounced out of danger. To tell the truth, the tide had turned in his favour overnight, and it was to convey the good news on deck the surgeon had left him.

While Dodd was recovering, the *Agra* was beating westward with light but contrary winds, and in a few weeks' time was about a hundred miles south of the Mauritius. Then the barometer began to fall, and Dodd, who had again assumed command, began to feel uneasy. Somewhat to the surprise of the crew—for there was now scarce a breath of air—he furled his sails and made the ship snug.

Kenealy asked him what was the matter.

"Barometer going down," was the reply.

Kenealy assured him it was a beautiful evening.

"See how red the sunset is.

'Evening red and morning grey
Are the sure signs of a fine day.'"

Dodd looked, and shook his head. The sun was red, but the wrong red, an angry red, and, as he dipped into the wave, discharged a lurid coppery hue that rushed over the entire heavens. The wind ceased altogether, and in the middle of an unnatural calm the glass went down, down, down. The moon

rose, and instantly all eyes were bent on her with suspicion; for in that latitude the hurricanes generally come at the full moon. She was tolerably clear, however, but a light cloud sailing across her disc showed there was wind in the upper regions.

Dodd trusted to science; barred the lee-ports, and then turned in for an hour's sleep.

Just at seven bells, in one moment, like a thunderbolt from the sky, a heavy squall struck the ship. Under a less careful captain her lee-ports would have been open, and she might have gone to the bottom like a bullet.

"Let go the main-sheet!" roared Sharpe hastily to a hand he had placed there for the purpose. He let go, and there was the sail flapping like thunder, and the sheet lashing everything in the most dangerous way. Dodd was on deck in a moment. "Helm hard up! Hands shorten sail!"

Up tumbled the crew, went cheerily to work, and by three bells in the middle watch had hauled up what was left of the shivered mainsail and hove the ship to; and so the voyage was suspended.

A heavy sea got up under a scourging wind, that rose and rose till the *Agra*, under the pressure of that single sail, heeled over so as to dip her lee channels. This went on till the waves rolled so high, and the squalls were so bitter, that sheets of water were launched on deck, not only drenching Dodd and his officers,

which they did not mind, but threatening to flood the ship.

Dodd battened down the hatches and stopped that game.

Then came a danger no skill could avert. The ship lurched so violently now as not merely to dip, but bury parts of her lower deck; and so a good deal of water was shipped. Then Dodd set a gang to the pumps; for, he said: "We can hardly hope to weather this out without shipping a sea; and I won't have water coming in upon water."

And now the wind, raging and roaring like discharges of artillery, and not like wind as known in our seas, seemed to have put out all the lights of heaven. The sky was inky black, and quite close to their heads; and, the wind still increasing, the vessel came down to her extreme bearings, and it was plain she would soon be on her beam-ends. Sharpe and Dodd met, and, holding on by the life-lines, applied their speaking-trumpets tight to each other's ears, and even then they had to bawl.

"She can't carry a rag much longer."

"No, sir, not half an hour."

"Can we furl that main-topsail?"

Sharpe shook his head. "The first moment we start a sheet the sail will whip the mast out of her."

"You are right. Well, then, I'll cut it away."

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"Volunteers, sir?"

"Ay, twelve; no more. Send them to my cabin."

Sharpe's difficulty was to keep the men back, so eager were the fine fellows to risk their lives. However, he brought twelve to the cabin, headed by Mr. Grey, who had a right, as captain of the watch, to go with them; on which right he insisted, in spite of Dodd's earnest request that he would forgo it. When Dodd saw his resolution, he dropped the friend and resumed the captain, and spoke to them through a trumpet; the first time he had ever used one in a cabin, or seen one used.

"Mr. Grey and men going aloft to save the main-mast by cutting the sail away."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Service of danger, great danger!"

"Hurrah!"

"But great dangers can be made smaller by working the right way. Attend! Lay out all on the yard, and take your time from one man at the lee yard-arm; don't know who that will be, but one of the smartest men in the ship. Order to him is: hold his knife hand well up; rest to see! and then in knives together. Mind and cut from you, and below the reef band; and then I hope to see all come down alive."

Mr. Grey and his twelve men left the cabin, and hey for the main-top! The men let the officer lead them as far as Jacob's ladder, and then hurrah for the

lee yard-arm! That was where all wanted to be, and but one could be.

They gained the top and lay out on the yard, with their hair flying like streamers, and who got the place of honour but Thompson, the jolly foretopman who couldn't stand smoked pea-soup. So strong and so weak are men.

Thompson raised his knife high; there was a pause. Then in went all their knives, and away went the sail into the night of the storm, and soon seemed a sheet of writing-paper, and more likely to hit the sky than the sea.

The ship was relieved, and all looked well for a time, when the wind, incredible as it may seem, increased, and one frightful squall dipped the muzzles of the lee-carronades in the water.

Then was heard the first cry of distress—an appalling sound: the wail of brave men. And they had borne it all so bravely, so cheerfully, till now. But now they knew that something must go, or else the ship. The suspense was awful but very short. Crack! Crack! The fore and main topmasts both gone short off by the caps; and the ship recovered slowly, hesitatingly, tremblingly.

But the heavy spars that had fallen, unable to break loose from the rigging, pounded the ship so savagely as to threaten to stave in her side. Add to this that some of the ship's seams began now to open and shut,

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which is terrible to the bravest seamen. Yet neither this stout captain nor his crew shirked any danger men had ever grappled with since men were.

Dodd ordered them to cut away the wreck to leeward; it was done. Then to windward; this, the more ticklish operation, was also done smartly. The wreck passed under the ship's quarter, and she drifted clear of it. They breathed again.

At eight bells in the first watch it began to thunder and lighten furiously; but the thunder, though close, was quite inaudible in the tremendous uproar of the wind and sea. It blew a hurricane; there were no more squalls now, but one continuous tornado, which, in its passage through that great gaunt skeleton, the ship's rigging and bare poles, howled and yelled and roared so terrifically as would have silenced a salvo of artillery fired alongside. The overwhelming sea ran in dark, watery mountains crested with devilish fire. The inky blackness added supernatural horror; the wrath of the Almighty seemed upon them, and His hand to drop the black sky down on them for their funeral pall. Surely Noah from his Ark saw nothing more terrible!

What is that? Close on the lee bow? The flash of a gun—another! another! another! A ship in distress firing minute-guns in their ears; yet no sound—human thunder silenced by the uproar of the wind and waves in their mad rage. The *Agra* fired two

minute-guns to let the other poor ship know she had a companion in her helplessness and her distress, and probably a companion in her fate.

And now came calamity upon calamity. A tremendous sea broke the tiller at the rudder-head, and not only was the ship in danger of falling off, and shipping the sea, but the rudder hammered her awfully, and bade fair to stave her in, which is another word for destruction. Thus death came at them with two hands open at once.

These vessels always carry a spare tiller. They tried to ship it, but the difficulty was prodigious. No light but the miserable deck-lantern, the *Agra* never on an even keel, and heeling over like a see-saw more than a ship; and then every time they did place the tiller, the awful sea gave it a blow and knocked it away like a hair.

At last they hit it off, or thought they had, for the ponderous thumps of the rudder ceased entirely. However, the ship did not obey this new tiller like the old one, and in an unlucky moment, when seven waves were rolling in one, she shipped a sea. It came in over her bow, broke as high as the mainstay, and hid and buried the whole ship before the mast; carried away the waist bulwarks on both sides, filled the launch, and drowned the live stock which were in it; swept four water-butts and three men away into the sea like corks and straws; and sent tons of water down

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the main hatchway, which was partly opened, and flooded the gun-deck ankle-deep.

Dodd, who was in his cabin, sent the whole crew to the pumps, except the men at the wheel, and prepared for the worst.

In men so brave as he was, when Hope dies Fear dies. His chief care now was to separate the fate of those he loved from his own. He took a bottle, inserted the fatal money in it, with a few words of love to his wife, and of direction to any stranger that should fall in with it; secured the cork with melted sealing-wax, tied oilskin over it, and melted wax on that; applied a preparation to the glass to close the pores; and, to protect it against other accidents and attract attention, fastened a black painted bladder to it by a stout tarred twine, and painted: "*Agra*, lost at sea", in white on the bladder.

He got on deck with the bottle in his pocket, and the bladder peeping out, and by means of the lifelines crawled along on his knees, and with great difficulty, to the wheel. Finding the men could hardly hold on, and dreading another sea, Dodd, with his own hands, lashed them to the helm.

While thus employed, he felt the ship give a slight roll—a very slight roll—to windward. His experienced eye lightened with hope; he cast his eager glance to leeward. There it is a sailor looks for the first spark of hope. Ay, thereaway was a little gleam of light. He

patted the helmsman on the shoulder and pointed to it; for now neither could one man speak for the wind nor another hear. The sailor nodded joyfully.

Presently the continuous tornado broke into squalls. Hope grew brighter.

But, unfortunately, in one furious squall the ship broke round off, so as to present her quarter to the sea at an unlucky moment; for it came, seven deep again, a roaring mountain, and hurled itself over her stern and quarter. The mighty mass struck her stern frame with the weight of a hundred thousand tons of water, and drove her forward as a boy launches his toy boat on a pond; and, though she made so little resistance, stove in the dead-lights and the port frames, burst through the cabin bulkheads, and washed out all the furniture and flooded the lower deck. Above, it swept the quarter-deck clean of everything except the shrieking helmsmen; washed Dodd away like a cork, and would have carried him overboard if he had not brought up against the main-mast and grasped it like grim death, half-drowned, half-stunned, sorely bruised, and gasping like a porpoise ashore.

He held on by the mast in water and foam, panting. He rolled his despairing eyes around; the bulwarks, fore and aft, were all in ruins, with wide chasms, as between the battlements of some decayed castle; and through the gaps he saw the sea yawning wide for him. He dare not move; no man was safe a moment unless

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lashed to mast or helm. He held on, expecting death. But presently it struck him he could see much farther than before. He looked up; it was clearing overhead, and the uproar abating visibly. And now the wind did not decline as after a gale; extraordinary to the last, it blew itself out.

Sharpe came on deck, and crawled on all-fours to his captain, and helped him to a life-line. He held on by it, and gave his orders. The wind was blown out, but the sea was as dangerous as ever. The ship began to roll to windward. If that was not stopped, her fate was sealed. Dodd had the main-trysail set, and then the fore-trysail, before he would yield to go below, though drenched, and sore, and hungry, and worn out. Those sails steadied the ship; the sea began to go down by degrees. The celestial part of nature was more generous: away flew every cloud, out came the heavenly sky bluer and lovelier than ever they had seen it; the sun flamed in its centre. Nature, after three days' eclipse, was so lovely it seemed a new heaven and a new earth. Dodd raised his eyes towards that lovely sky in heartfelt though silent gratitude to its Maker for saving the ship and cargo and her people's lives, not forgetting the private treasure he was carrying home to his dear wife and children.

With this thought he naturally looked down, but missed the bladder that had lately protruded from his

pocket. He clapped his hand to his pocket all in a flutter. The bottle was gone! In a fever of alarm and anxiety, but with good hopes of finding it, he searched the deck; he looked in every cranny, behind every coil of rope the sea had not carried away.

In vain!

The sea, acting on the buoyant bladder attached, had clearly torn the bottle out of his pocket when it washed him against the mast. His treasure, then, must have been driven much farther; and how far? Who could tell?

It flashed on the poor man with fearful distinctness that it must either have been picked up by somebody in the ship ere now, or else carried out to sea.

Strict inquiry was made amongst the men.

No one had seen it.

The fruit of his toil and prudence was gone. In its defence he had defeated two pirates, each his superior in force; and now conquered the elements at their maddest. And in the very moment of that great victory—it was gone!

CHAPTER V

Lost and Recovered

The sea was now a liquid paradise, its waters shining with the sparkle and hues of all the jewels in an emperor's crown. Imagine—after three days of inky sea and pitchy sky, and Death's deep jaws snapping and barely missing—ten thousand waves of brilliant colouring, dancing joyously beneath a gorgeous sun, and you will have a faint idea of what met the eyes and hearts of the rescued, looking out of that battered, jagged ship. Yet one man felt no buoyancy nor gush of joy. He leaned against a fragment of the broken bulwark, benumbed at heart through the loss of his wife's and children's treasured treasure, and almost weary of the existence he had battled for so stoutly. He looked so moody, and answered so grimly and unlike himself, that they all held aloof from him. And he was sore as well as heavy, for of all the lubberly acts he had ever known, the way he had lost his dear ones' fortune seemed to him the worst.

A voice sounded in his ear: "Poor thing! she has foundered."

It was Fullalove, scanning the horizon with a glass.

"Foundered? Who?" said Dodd, though he did not care much who sank, who swam. Then he remembered the vessel whose flashing guns had shed a ray on the unearthly horror of the black hurricane. He looked all round.

Blank!

Ay, she had perished with all hands. The sea had swallowed her, and spared him—ungrateful! This turned his mind sharply. Suppose the *Agra* had gone down, the money would be lost as it was now, and his life into the bargain—a life dearer to all at home than millions of gold. He felt better for the thought. "Come," said he to himself, "my loss has saved all these poor souls on board this ship. So be it! Heaven's will be done! I must bustle, or else go mad!"

He turned to, helping the men, and working like a horse.

The mate now reported the well nearly dry, and Dodd was about to make sail again when one of the ship-boys, a bright-eyed little fellow, came up to him and said:

"Please, Captain!" and then broke down with awe at his own daring.

"Well, my little man?" said Dodd gently.

Thus encouraged, the boy gave a great gulp, and burst in in a brogue: "Och, your honour, sure there's no rudder on her at all barring the tiller!"

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"What d'ye mean?"

"Don't murder me, your honour, and I'll tell ye. It's meself looked over the starrn just now, and I saw there was no rudder at all, at all."

Dodd ran to the helm and looked down. The brat was right. The blows which had so endangered the ship had broken the rudder, and the sea had washed away more than half of it. The sight and the reflection made him faintish for a moment.

"What is your name, urchin?"

"Ned Murphy, sir."

"Very well, Murphy, you are a fine little fellow; run and send the carpenter aft."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The carpenter came. In his own way he was clever enough; take him out of it, and lo! he was a mule, an owl. So to construct a makeshift rudder was quite beyond him, and Dodd was at his wits' end.

Fullalove, who stood by grinning, offered to make a rudder, provided the carpenter and mates were put under his orders. Dodd agreed, and the Yankee inventor, with spars, planks, and ropes, in a short time had his makeshift ready.

Some sail was now got on the ship, and she was found to steer very well. Dodd tried her on every tack, and at last ordered Sharpe to make all sail and head for the Cape.

This startled the first mate. The breeze was very

faint, but southerly, and Mauritius near. They could reach it in a night, and there ship a new rudder. He suggested the danger of sailing sixteen hundred miles steered by a gimcrack, and implored Dodd to put into port. Dodd answered him with a roughness never seen in him before:

"Danger, sir! There will be no more foul weather this voyage; Jonah is overboard."

Sharpe stared an inquiry. The captain stamped impatiently with his foot, and told Sharpe his duty was to obey orders, not discuss them. "Certainly, sir," said Sharpe sullenly, and went out of the cabin. He made all sail on the ship, and bore away for the Cape with a heavy heart.

Towards evening the sea became nearly dead calm. The look-out reported pieces of wreck to windward. As the ship was making so little way, Dodd beat up towards them. He feared it was a British ship that had foundered in the storm, and thought it his duty to ascertain and carry the sad news home. In two tacks they got near enough to see with their glasses that the fragments belonged, not to a stranger, but to the *Agra* herself. There was one of her water-butts and a broken mast with some rigging, and, as more wreck was coming in at a little distance, Dodd kept the ship close to the wind to inspect it. On drifting near, it proved to be several pieces of the bulwark, and a mahogany table not worth delaying the ship to pick

up; so Dodd made sail again, steering now south-east.

He had sailed about half a mile when the look-out hailed the deck again.

"A man in the water!"

"Whereabouts?"

"A short league on the weather quarter."

"Oh, we can't beat to windward for him!" said Sharpe; "he is dead long ago."

"Holds his head very high for a corpse," said the look-out.

"I'll soon know," cried Dodd. "Lower the gig; I'll go myself."

The gig was lowered, and six swift rowers pulled him to windward, while the ship kept on her course.

It is most unusual for a captain to leave the ship at sea on such petty errands, but Dodd half-hoped the man might be alive. And he was so unhappy, and grasped instinctively at a chance of doing kindness to some poor fellow alive or dead. That would soothe his own sore, good heart.

When they had pulled about two miles the sun was sinking into the horizon. "Give way, men," said Dodd, "or we shall not be able to see him." The men bent to their oars and made the boat fly.

Presently the coxswain caught sight of an object bobbing on the water.

"Why, that must be it," said he; "the lubber! to

take it for a man's head. Why, it is nothing but a thundering old bladder, speckled white."

"What?" cried Dodd, and fell a-trembling. "Steer for it! Give way!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

They soon came alongside the bladder, and the coxswain grabbed it. "Hallo! here's something lashed to it; a bottle!"

"Give it me!" gasped Dodd in a voice choked with agitation. "Give it me! Back to the ship! Fly! fly! Cut her off, or she'll give us the slip now."

He never spoke a word more, but sat in a stupor of joyful wonder.

They soon caught the ship. He got into his cabin, he scarce knew how, broke the bottle to atoms, and found the cash uninjured. With trembling hands he restored it to its old place in his bosom, and sewed it tighter than ever. He could hardly realize the stroke of good fortune that seemed miraculous. His bosom seemed on fire with joy. He laughed and slapped Sharpe on the back a little vulgarly for him:

"Jonah is on board again, old fellow; look out for squalls."

Sharpe couldn't understand the change, so groaned aloud, and wished himself under any captain in the world but this, and in any other ship. He looked round to make sure he was not watched, and then tapped his forehead significantly. This somewhat

relieved him, and he did his duty smartly for a man going to the bottom with his eyes open.

But ill-luck is not to be bespoken any more than good. The *Agra's* ill-luck seemed to have blown itself out, for not a single danger occurred between this and the Cape, except to a youngster, which I fear I must relate on account of its remoter consequences.

Among the crew of this ship was a favourite goat, good-tempered, affectionate, and playful. But a single vice counterbalanced all his virtues—he drank! A year or two ago some light-hearted tempter taught him to sip grog; he took to it kindly, and was now arrived at such a pitch that at grog-time he used to butt his way in among the sailors to receive an allowance that was always served out to him.

After drinking he became stupid, angry, or sleepy. Now Master Freddy Beresford happened to meet him in the angry state, and, being a rough playfellow, tapped his nose with a battledore. Instantly Billy butted at him. Mischievous Fred screamed and jumped on the bulwarks. Billy went at him there; whereupon the young gentleman, with great lack of common sense, uttered a loud shriek and sprang into the sea at the very moment when his anxious mother was rushing to save him. She uttered a scream of agony, and would actually have followed him, but was held back, uttering shriek after shriek that pierced every heart within hearing.

But Dodd saw the boy go overboard, and vaulting over the bulwark near the helm, roared in the very air: "Heave the ship to!" and went splash into the water about ten yards from the place. He was soon followed by Vespasian, and a boat was lowered as quickly as possible. Dodd caught sight of a broad straw hat on the top of a wave, swam lustily to it, and found Freddy inside. Dodd turned to the ship, saw the poor mother, with white face and arms outstretched as if she would fly at them, and held the urchin up high to her with a joyful "hurrah!" The ship seemed alive, and to hurrah in return with a giant voice. The boat soon picked them up, and Dodd came up the side with Freddy in his arms, and placed him in his mother's with honest pride and sympathy.

Guess how she scolded and caressed her child all in a breath, and sobbed over him! For this no human pen has ever told, nor ever will. All I can just manage to convey is that, after she had all but eaten the little torment, she suddenly dropped him, and made a great rush at Dodd. She flung her arms round him, and kissed him eagerly, almost fiercely; then, carried away wild by mighty Nature, she patted him all over in the strangest way, and kissed his waistcoat, his arms, his hands, and rained tears of joy and gratitude on them.

Dodd was quite overpowered. "No, no!" said he. "Don't now, pray, don't! There, there! I know, my

dear, I know; I'm a father." And he was very near whimpering himself, but recovered the man and the commander, and said soothingly: "There, there!" and he hand her tenderly down to her cabin.

All this time he had actually forgotten the packet. But now a horrible fear came on him. He hurried to his own cabin and examined it. A little salt water had oozed through the bullet-hole and discoloured the leather, but that was all. He breathed again.

"Thank Heaven I forgot all about it!" said he; "it would have made a cur of me."

Lady Beresford's petty irritation against Dodd melted at once before so great a thing, and they became the best of friends.

CHAPTER VI

Ashore !

The ship being in port at the Cape, and two hundred hammers tapping at her, Dodd went ashore in search of Captain Robarts, and made the *Agra* over to him in the friendliest way, adding warmly that he had found every reason to be satisfied with the officers and the crew. To his surprise Captain Robarts received all this ungraciously. "You ought to have remained on board, sir, and made me over the command on the quarter-deck." Dodd replied politely that it would have been more formal. "Suppose I return immediately, and man the side for you, and then you board her, say, in half an hour?"

"I shall come when I like," replied Robarts crustily.

"And when will you like to come?" inquired Dodd with good-humour.

"Now; this moment; and I'll trouble you to come along with me."

"Certainly, sir."

They got a boat and went out to the ship. On coming alongside, Dodd thought to meet his wishes

by going first and receiving him; but the jealous, cross-grained fellow shoved roughly before him and led the way up the ship's side. Sharpe and the rest saluted him; he did not return the salute, but said hoarsely: "Turn the hands up to muster."

When they were all aft, he noticed one or two with their caps on. "Hats off!" cried he. "Do you know where you are? Do you know who you are looking at? If not, I'll show you. I'm here to restore discipline to this ship. Bear that in mind. You'll find I'm not a man to be trifled with. Now, you, sir, bring me the log-book."

He ran his eye over it, and closed it sharply. "Pirates and hurricanes! I never fell in with pirates nor hurricanes. I have heard of a breeze, and a gale, but I never knew a seaman worth his salt say 'hurricane'. Get another log-book, Mr. Sharpe; put down that it begins this day at noon; and enter that Captain Robarts came on deck, found the ship in a miserable condition, took the command, mustered the officers and men, and stopped the ship's company's grog for a week for receiving him with hats on."

Even Sharpe, that walking Obedience, was taken aback. "Stop—the ship's company's—grog—for a week, sir?"

"Yes, sir, for a week; and if you fling my orders back in my face, instead of clapping on sail to execute them, I'll have you towed ashore on a grating."

In short, the new captain came down on the ship like a blight.

He was especially hard on Dodd. Nothing that commander had done was right, nor, had he done the contrary, would that have been right. He was disgracefully behind time; and he ought to have put in to the Isle of France, which would have retarded him. His rope bulwarks were lubberly, his rudder a disgrace to navigation; he, Robarts, was not so green as to believe that any master had really sailed sixteen hundred miles with it, and if he had, more shame for him.

All this was spoken at Dodd—a thing no male does unless he is an awful snob—and grieved him, it was so unjust. He withdrew, wounded, to the little cabin he was entitled to as a passenger, and hugged his treasure for comfort.

Yet with all his love of discipline Robarts was not so fond of the ship as Dodd.

He insulted Mr. Tickell so that he left the service and entered a mercantile house ashore; he made several of the best men desert, and the ship went to sea short of hands. This threw heavier work on the crew, and led to many punishments and a steady current of abuse. Sharpe became a mere machine, always obeying, never speaking, and Grey was put under arrest for remonstrating against ungentlemanly language. The crew, depressed and irritated, went

through their duties sullenly. There was no song under the fore-castle in the first watch, and often no grog on the mess table at one bell. Dodd never came on the quarter-deck without being reminded he was only a passenger, and the ship was now under naval discipline. "I was reared in the royal navy, sir," would Robarts say; "that is the only school that breeds seamen." Dodd bore scores of similar taunts as a Newfoundland puts up with a terrier in office. He seldom replied, and when he did, in a few quiet, dignified words that gave no handle.

Robarts, who bore the name of a lucky captain, had fair weather all the way to St. Helena.

The guard-ship at this island was the *Salamanca*. She had left the Cape a week before the *Agra*. Captain Robarts, with his usual want of courtesy, went to anchor inshore of Her Majesty's ship. The wind failed at a critical moment, and a foul occurred. Rush came a boarding-party on to the merchant-ship and hacked away without mercy all her rigging that held on to the frigate, and in two minutes the ships were clear. An officer and boat's crew came for Robarts, and ordered him on board the *Salamanca*, and, to make sure of his coming, took him back with them.

He found the commodore standing stiff as a ram-rod on his quarter-deck. "Are you the master of the *Agra*?"

"I am, sir."

"Then she was commanded by a seaman, and is now commanded by a lubber. Don't apply for your papers this week, for you won't get them. Good morning! Take him back."

They returned Robarts to his ship, and a suppressed grin on a score of faces showed him the clear commanding tones of the commodore had reached his own deck. He soothed himself by stopping the men's grog and mast-heading three midshipmen that same afternoon.

At the end of a week Robarts weighed anchor, and a south-westerly breeze carried him past the Azores. Off Ushant it was westerly, and veered to the nor'-west just before they sighted the Land's End. And now all hearts beat joyfully—none more than David Dodd's.

Robarts steered in for the Lizard; but, when abreast the Point, kept well out again, and looked for a pilot. One was soon seen working out towards him, and the *Agra* brought to. The pilot descended from his lugger into his little boat, rowed alongside, and came on deck; a rough, tanned sailor, who in build and manner might have passed for Robarts' twin brother.

"Now then, you, sir, what will you take this ship up to the Downs for?"

"Thirty pounds."

Robarts told him roughly he would not get thirty pounds out of him.

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"That's my price," answered the pilot sturdily.

Robarts swore at him lustily. Pilot discharged a volley in return quickly. Robarts retorted, the other rough customer rejoined, and soon there was a very pretty row on the *Agra's* quarter-deck.

Finally Robarts ordered the other to quit the ship on pain of being thrown overboard.

"Oh, that's it, is it!" growled the pilot as he retired. Safe in his boat he shook his fist at the *Agra*, and hardly blessed her captain. "You see the fair wind, but you don't see the Channel fret a-coming, you greedy gander. Downs! You'll never see them. You have saved your money, but you'll lose your ship, you lubber!"

Robarts ordered the mate to clap on all sail and keep a mid-channel course through the night.

At four bells in the middle watch Sharpe tapped at Robarts' door. "Blowing hard, sir, and the weather getting thickish."

"Wind fair still?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then call me if it blows any harder," grunted Robarts.

In two hours more, tap, tap, came Bayliss, in charge. "If we don't take sail in, they'll take themselves out."

"Furl top-gallant sails, and call me if it gets any worse."

In another hour Bayliss was at him again. "Blowing a gale, sir, and a Channel fog on."

"Reef top-sails, and call me if it gets any worse."

At daybreak Dodd was on deck, and found the ship flying through a fog so thick that her forecastle was quite invisible from the poop, and even her foremast loomed indistinct and looked distant.

"You'll be foul of something or other, Sharpe," said he.

"What is that to you?" inquired a loud rough voice behind him. "I don't allow passengers to handle my ship."

"Then do pray handle her yourself, Captain! Is this weather to go tearing happy-go-lucky up the Channel?"

"I mean to sail her without your advice, sir; and, being a seaman, I shall get all I can out of a fair wind."

"That is right, Captain Robarts, if you had but the British Channel all to yourself."

"Perhaps you will leave me my deck all to myself."

"I should be delighted; but my anxiety will not let me." With this Dodd retired a few steps, and kept a keen look-out.

At noon a lusty voice cried: "Land on the weather beam!"

All eyes were turned that way and saw nothing.

Land in sight was reported to Captain Robarts.

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Now that worthy was in reality getting secretly anxious; so he ran on deck crying: "Who saw it?"

"Captain Dodd, sir."

"Ugh! Nobody else?"

Dodd came forward, and, with a respectful air, told him that, being on the look-out, he had seen the coast of the Isle of Wight in a momentary lift of the haze.

"Isle of Fiddlestick!" was the polite reply; "Isle of Wight is eighty miles astern by now."

Dodd answered firmly that he was well acquainted with every outline in the Channel, and that the land he had seen was St. Katherine's Point.

Robarts deigned no reply, but went to his cabin and consulted his chart; and, having worked his problem, came hastily on deck, and went from rashness to wonderful caution. "Turn the hands out, and heave the ship to!"

"There, Mr. Dodd, so much for you and your Isle of Wight. The land you saw was Dungeness, and you would have run on into the North Sea, I'll be bound."

Dodd replied: "At all events I should not make a foul wind out of a fair one by heaving to; and, if I did, I would heave to on the right tack."

At this sudden facer—one, too, from a patient man—Robarts staggered a moment. He recovered, and ordered Dodd to go below, or he would have him chucked into the hold.

"Come, don't be foolish, Robarts," said Dodd

contemptuously. Then, lowering his voice to a whisper: "Don't you know the men only want such an order as that to chuck you into the sea?"

Robarts trembled. "Oh, if you mean to head a mutiny——!"

"Heaven forbid, sir! But I won't leave the deck in dirty weather like this till the captain knows where he is."

Towards sunset it got clearer, and they drifted past a revenue cutter, who was lying-to with her head to the northward. She hoisted no end of signals, but they understood none of them, and her captain waved to them wildly on her deck.

"What is that ape dancing at?" inquired Captain Robarts brutally.

"To see a first-class ship drift to leeward in a narrow sea with a fair wind," said Dodd bitterly.

At night it blew hard, and the sea ran high and irregular. The ship began to be uneasy, and Robarts very properly ordered the top-gallant and royal yards to be sent down on deck. Dodd would have had them down twelve hours before. The mate gave the order, but no one moved. The mate went forward angry. He came back pale. The men refused to go aloft. They would not risk their lives for such a skipper as Captain Robarts.

The officers all assembled and went forward. They promised and threatened, but all in vain. The men stood sullen and refused to go.

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Robarts received this tidings in savage silence. "Don't tell that Dodd, whatever you do," he said at length. "They will come round now they have had their growl; they are too near home to shy away their pay."

But just at this time the ex-captain of the *Agra* was down in the cabin with his fellow-passengers. He had a chart before him, and a pair of compasses in his hand.

As Robarts entered the cabin he looked up and said: "Captain, you saw the rate we passed the revenue cutter. That vessel was nearly stationary, so what we passed her at was our own rate of drifting. Seeing that we have been doing this for the past twelve hours, we can't be many miles from the French coast, and, unless we look sharp and beat to windward, I pronounce the ship in danger."

A harsh laugh greeted this conclusion.

"We are nearer Yarmouth sands than France, I promise you, and nothing under our lee nearer than Rotterdam."

A loud cry from the deck above: "A light on the lee bow!"

"There!" cried Robarts with an oath; "foul of her next, through me listening to your nonsense." He ran upon deck, and shouted through his trumpet, "All hands wear ship!"

The crew, who had heard the previous cry, obeyed

orders in the presence of an immediate danger; and perhaps their growl had really relieved their ill-humour. Robarts, with delight, saw them come tumbling up, and gave his orders lustily.

The ship's bow turned from the wind, and, as soon as she got way on her, Robarts ran below again and entered the cabin triumphant.

"That is all right; and now, Captain Dodd, a word with you. You will either retire at once to your cabin, or will cease to breed disaffection in my crew, and groundless alarm in my passengers, by instilling your own childish, ignorant fears. The ship has been under-logged a hundred miles, sir; and, but for my caution in lying to for clear weather, we should be groping among the Fern Isl——"

Crash!

An unheard-of shock threw the speaker and all the rest in a mass on the floor, smashed every lamp, put out every light; and, with a fierce grating noise, the ship was hard and fast on the French coast, with her stern to the sea.

One awful moment of silence, then, amidst shrieks of agony, the sea struck her like a rolling rock, solid to crush, liquid to drown, and the comb of a wave smashed the cabin windows and rushed in among them as they floundered on the floor and wetted and chilled them to the marrow. A voice in the dark cried: "O God! we are dead men!"

CHAPTER VII

Safe at Last

"On deck for your lives!" cried Dodd, forgetting in that awful moment he was not the captain, and drove them all up, Robarts included, and caught hold of Mrs. Beresford and Freddy at their cabin door and half-carried them with him. Just as they got on deck, the third wave, a high one, struck the ship and lifted her bodily up, canted her round, and dashed her down again some yards to leeward, throwing them down on the hard and streaming deck.

At this tremendous shock the ship seemed a live thing, shrieking and wailing, as well as quivering with the blow.

But one voice dissented loudly from the general dismay. "All right, men!" cried Dodd, firm and trumpet-like. "She is broadside on now. Captain Robarts, look alive, sir; speak to the men! Don't go to sleep!"

Robarts was in a helpless state of fear. At this appeal he started into a kind of courage. "Stick to the ship," he yelled; "there is no danger if you stick

to the ship;" and with this snatched a lifebuoy, and hurled himself into the sea.

Dodd caught up the trumpet that fell from his hand and roared: "I command this ship. Officers, come round me! Men to your quarters! Come, bear a hand here and fire a gun. That will show us where we are, and let the Frenchmen know."

The carronade was fired, and its flash revealed that the ship was ashore in a little bay. The land was low and some eighty yards off; but there was something black and rugged nearer the ship's stern.

Their situation was awful. To windward huge black waves rose like tremendous ruins, and came rolling, fringed with devouring fire; and each wave as it charged them curled up to an incredible height and dashed down on the doomed ship with a ponderous stroke that made the poor souls stagger, and sent a sheet of water so clean over her that part fell to leeward, and only part came down on deck, foretaste of a watery death; and each of these fearful blows drove the groaning, trembling vessel farther on the sand, bumping her along as if she had been but a skiff.

Now it was men showed their inner selves.

Seeing death so near on one hand, and a chance of escape on the other, Bayliss, the midshipman, and five sailors stole the only available boat and lowered her.

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She was swamped in a moment.

Some of the crew got to the rum, and stupefied themselves to their destruction.

Others rallied round their old captain, and recovered their native courage at the brave and hopeful bearing he wore over a heart full of anguish. He worked like a horse, encouraging, commanding, doing; he loaded a carronade with a pound of powder and a coil of rope, with an iron bar attached to a cable, and shot the rope and bar ashore.

A gun was now fired from the guard-house, whose light Robarts had taken for a ship. But no light being shown any nearer on the coast, and the ship expected every minute to go to pieces, Dodd asked if anyone would try to swim ashore with a line made fast to a hawser on board.

A sailor offered to go if any other man would risk his life along with him. Instantly Fullalove stripped, and Vespasian next.

"Two are enough on such a desperate errand," said Dodd with a groan.

But now emulation was up, and neither Briton, Yankee, nor negro would give way. A line was made fast to the sailor's waist, and he was lowered to leeward; his venturesome rivals followed. The sea swallowed those three heroes like crumbs, and small was the hope of life for them.

The three heroes, being first-rate swimmers and

divers, and going with the tide, soon neared the shore. But a sight of it was enough; to attempt to land on that rock, with such a sea on, was to get their skulls smashed like egg-shells in a moment. They had to coast it, looking out for a soft place.

They found one, and tried to land; but so irresistible was the suction of the retiring wave that, whenever they got foot on the sand and tried to run, they were wrenched out to sea again, and pounded black and blue and breathless by the curling breaker they met coming in.

After a score of vain efforts, the negro, throwing himself on his back, went in with a high wave, and, on touching the sand, turned, dug all his ten claws into it, clenched his teeth, and scrambled like a cat at a wall. Having more power in his toes than the Europeans, and luckily getting one hand on a firm stone, his prodigious strength just enabled him to stick fast while the wave went back; and then, seizing the moment, he tore himself ashore, but bleeding and bruised all over, and with a tooth actually broken by clenching in the convulsive struggle.

He found some natives dancing about in violent agitation with a rope, but afraid to go in and help him; and no wonder, not being sea-gulls. By the light of their lanterns he saw Fullalove washing in and out like a log. He seized one end of the rope, and dashed in and grabbed his friend, and they were hauled ashore

together, both breathless, and Fullalove speechless.

The negro looked round for the sailor, but could not see him. Soon, however, there was a cry from some more natives, about fifty yards off, and lanterns held up. Away he dashed with the rope, just in time to see Jack make a last gallant attempt to land. It ended in his being flung up like a straw into the air on the very crest of a wave fifteen feet high, and out to sea with his arms whirling, and a death shriek which was echoed by every woman within hearing.

In dashed Vespasian with the rope, and gripped the drowning man's long hair with his teeth; then jerked the rope, and they were both pulled ashore with infinite difficulty. The good-natured Frenchmen gave them all three cheers and lots of brandy and pats on the back, and carried the line for them to a flagstaff on the rocks nearer the stern of the ship.

The ship began to show the first signs of breaking up. Hammered to death by the sea, her decks began to gape and grin fore and aft. Dodd shouted for "axes to cut the weather shrouds!"

It was done; the foremast went by the board directly and fell to leeward. A few blows of the axe from Dodd's own hand sent the main-mast after it.

The *Agra* rose a streak, and the next wave carried her a little farther on shore.

And now the man in charge of the hawser reported with joy that there was a strain on it.

This gave those on board a hope of life. Dodd hustled and had the hawser carefully payed out by two men, while he himself secured the other end in the mizzen-top: he had left that mast standing on purpose.

There was no fog here; but great heavy black clouds, flying about with amazing swiftness, extinguished the moon at intervals; at others she glimmered through a dull mist, in which she was veiled, and gave the poor souls on the *Agra* a dim peep of the frail and narrow bridge they must pass to live. A line like a black snake went down from the mizzen-top towards the yawning sea, and was soon lost to sight. It was seen rising again among some lanterns on the rock ashore; but what became of it in the middle? The darkness seemed to cut it in two, the sea to swallow it. Yet, to get from a ship going to pieces under them, the sailors threw themselves eagerly on that black thread flickering in the wind. They went down it, one after another, and anxious eyes straining after them saw them no more. But this was seen, that scarce one in three emerged into the lights ashore.

Then Dodd got an axe and stood in the top, and threatened to brain the first man who attempted to go on the rope.

"We must make it taut first," said he; "bear a hand here with a tackle."

Even while this was being done, the other rope,

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whose end he had fired ashore, was seen moving to windward. The natives, it seems, had found it half-buried in sand.

Dodd unlashed the end from the bulwarks and carried it into the top and made it fast; and soon there were two black snakes dipping shorewards and waving in the air side by side.

The sailors scrambled for a place, and some of them were lost by their own rashness. Kenealy waited coolly and went by himself.

Finally, Dodd was left in the ship with Mr. Sharpe, and the women, and little Murphy, and Ramgolam, whom Robarts had liberated to show his contempt of Dodd.

He now advised Mrs. Beresford to be lashed to Sharpe and himself, and venture the passage; but she screamed and clung to him, and said: "I dare not! oh, I dare not!"

"Then I must lash you to a spar," said he, "for she can't last much longer." He ordered Sharpe ashore. Sharpe shook hands with him, and went on the rope with tears in his eyes.

Dodd went hard to work: lashed Mrs. Beresford to a piece of broken water-butt; filled Fred's pockets with corks, and sewed them up. Mrs. Beresford threw her arms round his neck in terror. "All right!" said Dodd, interpreting it as an appeal to his protection, and affecting cheerfulness; "we'll get ashore together

on the poop awning, or somehow; never you fear. I'd give a thousand pounds to know when high water is!"

At this moment, with a report like a cannon, the lower decks burst fore and aft. Another, still louder, and the *Agra* parted amidships with a fearful yawn, and the waves went toppling and curling clean through her.

At this appalling sound and sight the few creatures left on the poop cowered screaming and clinging at Dodd's knees, and fought for a bit of him. Dodd stood in the middle of these tremblers, a rock of manhood; and when he was silent, and they heard only the voice of the waves, they despaired; and whenever he spoke they started at the astounding calmness of his voice and words, and life sounded possible.

"Come," said he, "this won't do any longer. All hands into the mizzen-top!"

He helped them all up, and stood on the ratlines himself, and, if you will believe me, the poor goat wailed like a child below. But they had to leave him on deck; no help for it. Dodd advised Mrs. Beresford once more to attempt the rope; she declined. "I dare not! I dare not!" she cried, but she begged Dodd hard to go on it and save himself.

It was a strong temptation; he clutched the treasure in his bosom, and one sob burst from the strong man.

That sob was but the tax paid by Nature; for pride, humanity, and manhood stood staunch in spite of it.

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"No, no, I can't," said he; "I mustn't. Don't tempt me to leave you in this plight and be a cur! Live or die I must be the last man on her. Here's something coming out to us; the Lord in heaven be praised!"

A bright light was seen moving down the black line that held them to the shore. It descended slowly within a foot of the billows, and, lighting them up, showed their fearful proximity to the rope in mid-passage—they had washed off many a poor fellow at that part.

"Look at that! Thank Heaven you did not try it!" said Dodd to Mrs. Beresford.

At this moment a higher wave than usual swallowed up the light; there was a loud cry of dismay from the shore, and a wail of despair from the ship.

No! not lost after all! The light emerged, and mounted and mounted towards the ship.

It came nearer, and showed the black, shiny body of Vespasian, with very little on but a handkerchief and a lantern—the former round his waist and the latter lashed to his back. He arrived with a "Yah! yah!" and showed his white teeth in a grin.

Mrs. Beresford clutched his shoulder and whimpered: "Oh, Mr. Black!"

"Iss, Missy, dis child bring good news. Cap'n! Massah Fullalove send you his congratulations, and the compliments of the season; and take the liberty to observe the tide am turn in twenty minutes."

The good news thus quaintly announced caused an outburst of joy from Dodd, and, sailor-like, he insisted on all hands joining in a cheer. The shore re-echoed it directly. And this encouraged the forlorn band still more: to hear other hearts beating for them so near.

At this moment came the first faint streaks of welcome dawn, and revealed their situation more fully.

The vessel lay on the edge of a sandbank. She was clean in two, the stern lying somewhat higher than the stem. The sea rolled through her amidships, six feet broad, frightful to look at, and made a clean breach over her forward, all except the bowsprit, to the end of which three poor sailors were now discovered to be clinging. The afterpart of the poop was out of water, and in a corner of it the goat crouched like a rabbit.

No sign of the tide turning yet, and much reason to fear it would turn too late for them and the poor fellows shivering on the bowsprit.

These fears were well founded.

A huge sea rolled in and turned the forepart of the vessel half over, buried the bowsprit, and washed the men off into the breakers.

Mrs. Beresford sank down and prayed, holding Vespasian by the knee.

Fortunately, as in that vessel wrecked long ago on

Melita, "the hind part of the ship stuck fast and remained immovable".

But for how long?

Each wave now struck the ship's weather quarter with a sound like a cannon fired in a church, and sent the water clean into the mizzen-top. It hit them like strokes of a whip. They were drenched to the skin, chilled to the bone, and frozen to the heart with fear.

Now the sea, you must know, was literally strewed with things out of the *Agra*: masts, rigging, furniture, tea-chests, bundles of canes, chairs, tables; but of all this Dodd's eye had been for some little time fixed on one object—a live sailor drifting ashore on a great wooden case. It struck him, after a while, that the man made very little way, and at last seemed to go up and down in one place. By and by he saw him nearer and nearer, and recognized him. It was one of the three washed off the bowsprit.

He cried joyfully: "The tide has turned! Here's Thompson coming out to sea!"

Then there ensued a dialogue, incredible to landmen, between these two sailors, the captain of the ship and the captain of the fore-top, one perched on a stationary fragment of that vessel, the other drifting on a pianoforte, and both bawling at one another across the jaws of death.

"Thompson, ahoy!"

"Hal-lo!"

"Whither bound?"

"Going out with the tide, and be hanged to me."

"What! can't ye swim?"

"Like a brass figure-head. It's all over with poor Jack, sir."

"All over! Don't tell me! Look out now, as you drift under our stern, and we'll lower you the four-inch hawser."

"Lord bless you, sir, do, pray!" cried Thompson, losing his recklessness with the chance of life.

By this time the shore was black with people, and a boat was brought down to the beach; but to attempt to launch it was to be sucked out to sea.

At present all eyes were fixed on Thompson, drifting to destruction.

Dodd cut the four-inch hawser, and Vespasian, on deck, lowered it with a line, so that Thompson presently drifted right athwart it. "All right, sir!" said he, grasping it, and amidst thundering acclamations was drawn to land full of salt water and all but insensible. The piano landed at Dunkirk three weeks later.

In the bustle of this good and smart action the tide retired perceptibly.

By and by the sea struck lower and with less weight.

At nine p.m. Dodd took his little party down on deck again, being now the safest place, for the mast might go.

Mrs. Beresford clung to Vespasian; she held his bare black shoulder with one white and jewelled hand, and his wrist with the other, tight. "Oh, Mr. Black," said she, "how brave you are! It is incredible! Why, you came back! I must feel a brave man with both my hands, or I shall die! I shall never outlive this dreadful day!"

And now that the water was too low to wash them off the hawser, several of the ship's company came back to the ship to help the women down.

By noon the *Agra's* deck was thirty feet from the sand. The rescued ones wanted to break their legs and necks, but Dodd would not permit even that. He superintended the whole work, and lowered them all, not omitting the poor goat, who was motionless and limp with fright.

When they were all safe on the sand, Dodd stood alone upon the poop a minute, cheered by all the sailors, French and English, ashore, then slid down a rope and rejoined his companions.

To their infinite surprise the undaunted one was found to be snivelling.

"Oh, dear! what is the matter?" said Mrs. Beresford tenderly.

"The poor *Agra*, ma'am. She was such a beautiful sea-boat; and just look at her now! Never sail again; never, never! She was a little crank in beating, I can't deny it, but how she did fly with the wind abaft.

She sank a pirate in the Straits, and weathered a hurricane off the Mauritius; and, after all, for a lubber to go and lay her bones ashore in a fair wind! Poor dear beauty!"

He maundered thus, and kept turning back to look at the wreck, till he happened to lay his hand on his breast. He stopped in the middle of his ridiculous lament, wore a look of self-reproach, and cast his eyes upward in heartfelt gratitude.

The companions of so many adventures dispersed.

A hospitable mayoress entertained Mrs. Beresford and suite; and she took to her bed, for she fell seriously ill as soon as ever she could do it with impunity.

Colonel Kenealy went off to Paris. "I'll gain that, anyway, by being wrecked," said he.

If there be a lover of quadrupeds here, let him know that Billy's weakness proved his strength. Being brandied by a good-natured French sailor, he winked his eye; being brandied greatly, he staggered up and butted his benefactor like a man.

Fullalove had dry clothes and a blazing fire ready for Dodd in a little rude inn. He sat over it and dried a few bank-notes he had loose about him, and examined his greater treasure, his children's. The pocket-book was much stained, but no harm whatever done to the contents.

Dodd was extremely anxious to get to Barkington

before the news of the wreck; for otherwise he knew his wife and children would suffer a year's agony in a single day. The only chance he saw was to get to Boulogne in time to catch the *Nancy* sailing-packet; for it was her day. But then Boulogne was eight miles distant, and there was no public conveyance going.

Accordingly, after a short rest, he started on his walk to Boulogne, a happy man.

The master of the *Nancy* knew Dodd well, and gave him a nice cot to sleep in. He tumbled in with a bad headache and quite worn out, and never woke for fifteen hours.

And when he did wake he was at Barkington. He and It landed on the quay. He made for home. On the way he passed the bank. A thrill of joy went through him. Now It was safe. When he first sewed up the cash in Calcutta it seemed secure nowhere except on his own person. But since then the manifold perils by sea and land It had encountered through being on him had caused a strong reaction in his mind on that point. He longed to see It safe out of his own hands and in good custody. He made for the door with a joyful rush, waved his cap over his head in triumph, entered, and deposited It with the manager of the bank.

